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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ES](#)
SUBJECT: DEPARTING FOREIGN MINISTER ON SACA AND THE ELECTION
REF: SAN SALVADOR 00036

Classified By: Ambassador Charles L. Glazer, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) On January 14, outgoing Salvadoran Foreign Minister Francisco "Pancho" Lainez told the Ambassador that he planned to leave his post, as required by the Salvadoran Constitution, in order to seek the ARENA party's nomination for President. He said he planned to officially announce his resignation at a ceremony at Casa Presidencial on January 15. Lainez will also resign his position as a member of COENA (ARENA's National Executive Committee).

¶2. (S) Lainez gave the Ambassador his frank assessment of Salvadoran President Elias Antonio "Tony" Saca's state of mind as the election season and ARENA candidate selection progresses. According to Lainez, Saca is having a difficult time letting go of the reins of power. Saca, Lainez believes, would remain "president for life" if there were a way. Lainez claims that Saca, for now, is supporting the candidacies of Federico Colorado and Luis Mario Rodriguez (reftel) in part because he believes he can control them after he leaves office. Lainez suggested Saca is naive in this regard.

¶3. (S) Lainez also told the Ambassador that he was worried about his personal safety and that of his family. He mentioned that he had obtained an armored vehicle and that he had received an offer from the OIE (the Salvadoran Intelligence Service) for protection.

¶4. (S) Lainez told the Ambassador that he had the backing of most of the business sector and was confident he would be one of the three contenders to make it to the final round of ARENA candidate selection process. He also said that he has spoken to Rene Figueroa, Minister of Security and Justice and former pre-candidate who has recently withdrawn from the process. They discussed the possibility of Figueroa supporting Lainez' candidacy, and Figueroa said he would discuss the possibility in due course.

¶5. (S) Comment: Lainez' comments regarding Saca's difficulty in leaving power ring true. It is clear that Lainez has an interest in currying favor with the Embassy. As regards Lainez' security issues, Vice President Escobar expressed similar fears to us, though we have no evidence that prominent cabinet ministers face serious security threats from an intra-party race. End Comment.

Glazer